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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a window into Japanese learners' thoughts about what it is necessary for teachers and learners to do in order to foster Japanese learner autonomy--and why Japanese learners would find this so difficult to do. There are numerous student journal and interview excerpts providing interesting insight to what Japanese learners think about what they should do, what they actually do, and why it is difficult for them to take the more active role that they agree they should. The paper begins by defining its terms--learner autonomy and learner development. It then goes on to discuss learners' political awareness, the issue of learner universality, and the influence of culture on learner autonomy. The study included 46 college students. It is concluded that it will be extremely difficult to make the needed behavior changes. (Contains 33 references.) (KFT)

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Learner Autonomy : Learning from the Students' Voice

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Abstract

Although learner autonomy has been increasingly paid attention to in language learning and teaching, what does learner autonomy really mean? Holec (1981) said that learner autonomy is the ability to take responsibility for the learners' own learning. Then, what does "the responsibility" mean? It is my belief that "learners' responsibility for their learning" means their awareness of the responsibility for their own role as learners in any learning situation. In this paper, firstly, the issue of learner autonomy definitions will be identified. Then future implications of learner autonomy development will be discussed, on the basis of several samples of foreign language learners' perspectives.

1. What is Learner Autonomy ?

Learner autonomy is defined as learners' taking responsibility for their own learning (Holec,1981). It is my belief that learner responsibility means learners are aware of their role as a learner. In other words, it is the learners' internal attitude towards themselves as a learner. Therefore, it is not just an issue of offering time and space freedom, but rather internal flexibility we should be concerned with. Learner autonomy means not giving the learning environment, but it is the students' motivation to make their own environment for their learning. In my opinion, autonomous learning does not necessarily mean a complete shift of instructional mode from teachers to learners. Instead, it can involve various teaching styles or ways of promoting learner autonomy, depending on the context of the classroom. According to Little (1995), the learners' acceptance of responsibility is the basis of learner autonomy, which has both socio-affective and cognitive implications. Dickinson (1996) said learning autonomy may be internal to the learner without having to be made public. On the other hand, Wenden (1996) suggested that it was the importance of students' metacognitive knowledge. She claimed that true learner autonomy means how students

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reflect on their learning and realise that they have effective learning opportunities.

In this article, I would like to stress two things :

First, learner autonomy is not a matter of institutional mode, but it is a matter of learners' internal attitude.

Second, learner autonomy is the awareness of both self-direction and collaboration between teacher and students, and student to student relationships. Especially, a teacher's attitude towards his/her students might be the key for learner autonomy.

2. What is Learner Development ?

According to Sinclair (1996/7), learner autonomy can be considered from both a psychological and a political dimension.

(2-1) Promoting Psychological Awareness

Learner development aims to raise the learners' self-directed awareness of their own learning processes through planning, monitoring, and evaluation (e.g. Wenden, 1991). Brookfield (1985) identified two major aspects of 'self-directedness'. One is the technique of self-instruction and the other is internal changes in consciousness. Concerning the above aspects, I would like to consider learner autonomy as a focus of the latter dichotomy. Ridley (1997) claimed that what learners say and think about language learning is more important than their cognitive style or other tendencies.

To put it accurately, learners should have the opportunity to consciously reflect and question themselves in the following ways. What are my problems ? What do I need to do in order to overcome my problems ? How am I doing now ? How can I motivate myself ? What can I do in the future ?

Learner development ought to promote learners' self-confidence and self-motivation through the language learning process, in order to encourage learners to believe in their own potential. Students themselves need to improve their ability of self-analysis and encourage themselves to trust in their own potential. At the same time, it is extremely important for

students to get the teachers' support and understanding. The teachers' role should be considered as that of making an effort to understand the learners' perspectives, and also, teachers should trust in their students' potential. Regarding this point, Lier (1996) argued that " a teacher cannot simply transmit the sort of skills and attitudes to learning that are required, nor can he or she train learners in the way that recruits are trained to march in step". As Hoffman (1997) said, " fostering autonomy is not just a matter of learning a few techniques-it involves changing the way in which we relate to learners ".

(2-2) Promoting Political Awareness

Widdowson (1987) cited that "the learner really exercises autonomy only within the limits set by teacher authority". Pennycook (1997) also insisted on students' empowerment "to become the author of one's world, to become an autonomous language learner and user is not so much a question of learning how to learn as it is a question of learning how to struggle for cultural alternatives"(p45). From the point of the political dimension of learner autonomy, learner development is a challenge for self-realisation as opposed to the limitation of the existing status quo for both teachers and students. It is the means by which they can become aware of this struggle.

3. The Issue of Learner Autonomy Universality

(3-1) Japanese Students' Classroom Behaviour

Japanese students are typically viewed as passive learners. Regarding teacher/learner role, the relationship between teachers and students are emphasised within the traditional classrooms. The students tend to be viewed as accepting the teachers' authority in an unquestioning and unchallenging manner. For example, some teachers working in Japan state typical Japanese students' classroom behaviour as :

"They are accustomed to a passive and deferential role sitting quietly in classrooms where the teacher determines everything and the students' main objective is not to make mistakes. They expect to be told and to absorb, but not to try things out for themselves." (Doye, 1997, p7).

"a typical classroom scene would find the teacher in control, giving explicit directions for every learning activity, and the students passively following those directions." (Robbins, 1996, p179).

" learning is seen as something to be handed down by someone in authority and stored in one's memory. " (Purdie, Douglas & Hattie, 1996).

"Nearly all foreign teachers of English complain about the lack of response they get from their students. When the teacher asks a question, no one raises his hand. When students are asked to stand and recite in class, they do so very reluctantly. Some even refuse outright. As a result, the pace of the class drags, and students and teacher alike get bored." (Mclean, 1998, p46).

Hayashi (1997) who is one of my colleagues also identified cross-cultural differences in Japanese and American students' views of classroom behaviours as follows:

"In Japan, there is a great distance between a teacher and a student. To put it another way, teachers are accorded a great deal of respect. This can be seen in the expression 'Don't step on one's teacher's shadow; keep three steps behind.' Although the students' attitudes toward the teacher have changed somewhat in recent years, this feeling of respect is still prevalent. Ide's (1982) (in Hayashi, 1997) analysis of the Japanese social rules of politeness is explains this point. According to her, Japanese social rules require that one 'be polite to a person with power' (p. 367). That is, a person performing his role as a professional, such as a professor, has power over a student. Since normally professors are older than their students, this rule is reinforced by another rule, 'Be polite in a formal setting' (p371), which would characterise a classroom setting in Japan".

On the other hand, Nimmannit (1998) indicates Japanese cultural virtue. According to Nimmannit, the students' passivity is shaped by cultural virtue such as "Silence is golden".

How do the Japanese students themselves hold their views, then ? Let me show some of the Japanese students' journals that commented on their passive attitudes.

"Even if it is a simple question, that everyone can answer, nobody tries to say anything. I think the students probably create this kind of atmosphere themselves. In this situation, it is extremely difficult to speak out. In fact, I feel the same. The matter of actively speaking out has become "shameful". Everyone may be aware that it is wrong, though everyone hopes that someone will break atmosphere." (student A)

"Talking about my past experiences, Japanese education has been making desperate efforts to complete school contents within the periods decided by the Ministry of Education. Teachers' instructions were apt to be monotonous without having time to spare. It was a one-way relationship between teacher and students, and we spent our education in such an atmosphere." (student B)

"At primary school, we were told to listen to someone quietly. In addition, when a student tried to speak out, they were scolded. We did not have enough opportunities to give our personal opinion. We have been educated like this. I do not think we can speak out even when asked, still less in a foreign language. We don't have the confidence to be understood. It doesn't help to become silent or passive. And I think this is Japanese culture." (student C)

(3-2) Learner Autonomy and Cultural Influence

One of the biggest controversial issues is learner autonomy universality. Crabbe (1996) claimed, " taking charge of learning is a characteristic of the human mind, that we all have the capacity to develop autonomy and although that capacity might not be the same for everyone, as teachers we have to work with individual potential ". Riley (1996) said that autonomy is a natural and necessary characteristic of human learning, an anthropological universal.
The above statements support universality of learner autonomy. However, there are arguments about cultural unsuitability of learner autonomy instructional mode, in particular, against cultural background (Littlewood, 1999). If learner autonomy is a Western value and not suitable for Asian contexts, learner autonomy universality would be deniable. From the above point, Aoki and Smith (1996) said, "the important issue with regard to learner autonomy is not whether autonomy itself is appropriate in cultural context --- but how negotiated versions of autonomy can be best enabled in all contexts, in varying ways, in

educative counterbalance to move authoritarian, teacher-dominated arrangements ".
Pierson (1996) said that the stereotype of the passive learner might not be wholly a product of culture, but should not be ignored by the structure of the present colonial education system. And he indicated " a fundamental principle of autonomous learning is that the locus of control is in the hands of the individual learner." (p. 50).
Esch (1996) also cited that " cultural differences may not be the main barrier to the promotion of the concept of autonomy in countries with a group-oriented tradition "(p46). Thomson (1996) also said that people are born self-directed learners, but appear to be influenced by their cultural, educational and developmental background. Moreover, Pennycook (1997) suggested that promoting autonomy in language learning needs to take into account the cultural contexts of the language learners. In this point, Sinclair (1997) suggested that different cultures and learning contexts require different approaches to promote learner autonomy.
In my opinion, learner autonomy must be a universal characteristic of human beings, and should be promoted for all learners as one of the important goals of language education. I also believe that the main focus of learner autonomy might be neither the matter of styles or strategies of learning mode, nor the matter of methods of teaching.

What needs to be considered in order to promote learner autonomy ? My belief is that learner development should aim :

- to raise the learners' awareness about how they conceptualise their own learning and how they perceive themselves as learners.

- to promote the learners' self-motivation towards language learning and develop awareness of their own learning process.

- to develop self-confidence and awareness of the learners' own progress.

I would like to figure out the above notions as follows:

Autonomy

Psychological definition

Learners' insight
Internal activity

Developing Learner Autonomy
- moving from surface learning to deep learning
- improving self-analysis ability/self-esteem

teachers = facilitators
- helping learners to develop learner autonomy
- helping learners to improve the learners' learning process

Political definition

Learners' voice

Struggling Learner Autonomy
- questioning of the learners' subjectivity
- questioning the power of authority

teachers = participants of learning
- learning as a teaching profession

4. Study

(4-1) Group Interview Data : Students' attitudes to the learner's role and classroom learning

(1) Method

My colleague and I organised focus-group interviews with first year, private university, EFL major students in Kanazawa, Japan in February, 1998 and 1999. 46 students (with an average of 2 - 4 students in each

group, male : female=14 : 32) were interviewed in their native language (Japanese) for one hour. The students attended the interview voluntarily. The interviewer was myself, who had never faced them before as a teacher. The interviews were done in a relaxed atmosphere, so that the students could feel free to express themselves. The interviews were taped and transcribed.

(2) The Results

In this article, the samples will be presented for discussing the students' behaviour and awareness about their role and classroom learning in translated English versions.

Sample 1 (female 3)

The following students talk about their role as learners.

Aiko:
We should show our personality. We should let other students and the teacher know what sort of person we are. Individual students should open up to others. It may be difficult though.

Sachi:
I am the same as everyone else. We students should act more on our own initiative. We should get what we can. There are various people at university, but most people are not active enough and just attend the class. People who major in English stop trying to improve once they can speak simple English. They seem to decide to stop. I am doing my best, but sometimes feel bored in class. Is it because of the lesson ? University study is different from high school study, where there are lots of things to do at home. I can do many things privately outside the classroom. I have many things to do, apart from digesting the lessons.

Junko:
We should even stimulate the teacher, so he becomes motivated to teach us. For example, if we ask lots of questions, he may realise that students want to know these kinds of things. In this way, students stimulate learning. Then, both the teacher and the students create a better atmosphere.

Sachi:
I think there are many students who are doing the minimum. We do not realise that all lesson contents can be used for our future, and there may be lots of useful things for us in our lessons.

Aiko:
The biggest problem is that many people have no particular aim.

Junko:
Many people do not know clearly what they need to do, so they simply try to get the necessary credits. So, many people think as long as they do the minimum requirement, they will have no problem.

Sachi:
On the other hand, there are some people who try to gain as much as possible because they want to improve themselves. Even though they do not have any clear objectives for their future, they try to do their best for the time being.

They discuss that the students should have responsibility to motivate themselves and be aware of their own initiative for their learning. They think that classroom atmosphere can also be improved by their motivation.

Sample 2 (female 2)

Taeko and Tomoko talked about their preferences of instructional methods in their classroom learning. These two students agreed on a communicative classroom atmosphere between a teacher and the students. Also, both of them did not want one-way lessons from a teacher to the students.

Taeko:
I came to university because I have something that I want to do. So, I want lessons that stimulated me more and were different from high school.

Tomoko:
We should learn by ourselves. It means that things should not only be taught, but we should also think what to learn and how to learn. So I feel something should be different from our past experiences of simply receiving information from the teacher. Maybe we are now allowed to show our desire to learn actively.

Toeko:
Even if we want to show our desire, there is a difficult atmosphere where we cannot do it so easily.

Tomoko:
Probably everyone wants to show this. So, someone should break the ice.

Taeko:
Yes, yes.

Tomoko:
So, whether I can do it or not, at least I feel something should be changed.

Taeko:
But, are we able to do it?

Tomoko:
We cannot do it, can we ? I wonder why we do not have the courage to do it.

Taeko:
Sometimes I feel that it is not good if we stay like this. I feel that we might be allowed to change something.

Tomoko indicated that the students themselves should show their attitude and their desire to learn actively. From Tomoko's claim, the discourse turned to challenge towards the power difference between a teacher and the students. In this point, both Tomoko and Taeko spoke out about their struggle between their desire and reality.

Sample 3 (male 2)

Researcher:
What sort of lessons do you think are not good ?

Toshiroo:
Passive.

Researcher:
A teacher and you only listen ? What does a passive lesson mean, if you describe it accurately ?

Toshiroo:
A teacher says, " do this, do that " and then we have to do it. If the lesson is like that, we can't think on our own. I think we need to have an active attitude - that is my opinion. It is not a bad thing, but---.

Ichiroo:
You say passive lessons are no good. But if the person has no wish to learn, it becomes a passive lesson. The person who is not passive probably has previewed the lesson and understands what's going on, so actively participates in the lesson.

Toshiroo:
For the person who did preview, the lesson will focus on something that they could not understand on his or her own. So, this kind of person will listen to the content of what they didn't understand.

Ichiroo:
But even they are not passive people. If the teacher would only proceed in a way that let the students do what he says, non-passive people would also become passive.

This group also wishes to have lessons where there are interactions, instead of only listening. In contrast, as far as good lessons, the word "passive" has become the topic of the discussion. The interesting point is that passive lessons mean not just the learning mode itself. They think that the learners' attitude makes passive or non-passive lessons even if it is a similar lesson. Also, the discourse suggests that teacher authority may discourage learners' motivation to be active learners.

Sample 4 (male 1, female 2)

Researcher:
What is an ideal lesson ?

Masaaki:
Well, --the best is when everyone comes to the class because they want to learn. Not because there are lessons, but because we want to come for using the lessons. Everyone wants to come, and then we do the lessons. That is the best.

Yasuko:
The lessons where everyone listens and is able to think. I do not like boring lessons.

Kazuko:
I like the lessons where everyone can participate. We should have an interest in the lesson.

Masaaki:
We will not gain anything from lessons in which we come and only receive. Anyway, the ideal lessons should be ones which we can feel that we could get something for ourselves. For example, if I think that today I got this kind of thing, even if only one word, I will feel satisfied.

Yasuko and Kazuko want lessons in which they can participate and do not feel separation between the teacher and students. On the other hand, Masaaki feels strongly that the most important thing is the learners' own awareness for learning. In this way of thinking, he thinks that learners' awareness decides whether lessons become ideal or not.

Sample 5 (male1, female1)
Researcher:
What lessons are not good ?

Susumu:
Well, Now, we are talking about some lessons that are no good. But I think it is not a fault of the lesson itself. There are students who don't

prepare for the lessons and just come to attend the class. Then, when we consider this situation, I would like to ask them what they want to do here. So, if we want to learn English, we should do it. Someone might say that the lesson is no good, but if we come for studying English, why we shouldn't we do it even if it's not so enjoyable. It may not be helpful for improving English conversational skills, but probably, it is good for TOEIC examinations, and also for our future employment opportunities.

Noriko:
No good lessons are---, there are some students who do not prepare and come to the lesson, and others who prepare and come. Lessons that are no good mean that the teacher adjusts his/her lessons for the non-prepared people. The teacher has the feeling of giving up and tells all the answers by him/herself. The teacher allows us to be lazy and the teacher gives us the answers. Then, gradually, no one wants to prepare for the lesson, and becomes lazy. I think these kinds of lessons are no good.

Researcher:
What is learner role ?

Susumu:
If we want to learn, we should start with ourselves first, not being told to do so.

Noriko:
What is learner role, I wonder ? It would be no good if we do not have the desire to learn. So, we should have a good attitude to study. We have entered university because we wanted to. If we don't have such a feeling, it will turn out like work similar to our high school days. It would become like a compulsory education for us.

Susumu considers learners' responsibility for attending the class. Noriko indicates teachers' responsibility to keep up the students' motivation. But both Susumu and Noriko are aware of the learners' role for their own learning.

Sample 6 (female 2)

Researcher:

What is the learners' role?

Ichiko:

At least, we should review what we have learnt, not just keeping what we have done in the past.

Hisae:

Teachers are also the same as students, which means they have their own ways of doing things. If students ask various questions, teachers may change their ways of teaching. In this way, students are also advisors for teachers. So, there are two ways (of interaction) between students and teachers.

Ichiko says students should not be just receiving the knowledge but should check what they have learnt. Hisae says that both teachers and students should interact with each other for improving their teaching and learning.

Sample 7 (female 3)

Researcher:

What is an ideal lesson ?

Kumiko:

I like the classes the best where there are many students who have the same purpose as I have and are motivated to learn.

Yukari :

In addition, I think the best class is where we can communicate with the teacher.

Yoshimi:

If the students are motivated or not (it is important). If someone chatters in the class, I feel frustrated and can not concentrate on the topic. If it happens, I will feel bad all day.

Kumiko:
If someone chatters or does something different, later that person will have problems. Some teachers do not tell them to stop chattering. But I would like the teacher to scold the students.

Researcher:
So, the ideal lesson depends on the people who make up the class ?

Kumiko:
Yes, yes.

Yoshimi:
This is one reason. Also, whether we can communicate with the teacher or not is also important.

Yukari:
Depending on the teacher.

Yoshimi:
If the teacher does not want to teach us, it is hard for us to ask him. One day, one of teachers said to us that if you do not understand, there is no way out of it. So, I can not ask him anymore, even if I have problems. He may think that I cannot do such a thing. If we are forced to accept only what the teacher thinks, we must shut our mouth.

Three students agree that it is the students' responsibility for classroom learning atmosphere. Also, teachers should be aware of establishing a relationship with their students.

Sample 8 (male 1, female 3)

The following students talked about their thinking about classroom learning and the learners' role.

Mari :
The learners' role is to attend class with a motivation to learn more.

Michiko :
If students are motivated to learn, teachers may also be motivated to teach. So, together with teachers, we students should accept our own

role of stimulating the class, show our motivation by, for example, asking questions in class. The most important point is that we are motivated.

Kazuhiro :
I would like to expect teachers to be good advisors when we have problems with continuing our studies, not only as far as English is concerned. If teachers think about students, we feel happy.

Michiko :
There should be no barriers between students and teachers.

Mari :
It is difficult to talk with teachers.

Rika :
We should make use of opportunities to stimulate one another (teachers and students).

Kazuhiro :
There are some lessons which are not so interesting, and we don't like lessons if we are not interested. But any lesson has some useful points. There is always something that we can use to improve ourselves. I believe that we should not completely hate or reject a class. Teachers try their best to teach us.

Michiko :
There are no lessons which are 100 % no good, are there ?

Mari :
No. The point is our motivation.

Michiko :
But there are teachers who never try to change, even though they know our feelings. I understand teachers have their own ways, but students don' t follow them. I would like teachers not to speak just about their specialist subject. Instead, teachers should concern themselves with what and how students learn, and with what students are interested in.

Rika :
One way lessons in which teachers talk. These kinds of lessons make it difficult for students to ask questions in class. Even if we wish to make lessons more interesting, it is hard in this kind of situation.

Mari :
There may be different answers possible, but in this kind of class, we think that we need to follow what the teacher says.

Michiko :
We are not getting anywhere. We keep coming back to the same point.

Mari :
Maybe, it is possible to apply this to various things.

Michiko :
Teachers also have their plans. So, they must follow the plans.

Mari :
To the next thing, then the next, like this, teachers go ahead. So, we have to follow, even if we have questions, it is hard to stop the stream of lessons and ask a question.

Kazuhiro :
The atmosphere is too quiet.

Michiko :
If we talk, it seems strange. That is what we feel.

Mari :
We are shy.

Michiko :
If we express our opinions, it seems to be no good. We feel that we should not interrupt.

Kazuhiro :
If he/she speaks out, that person will stand out.

Mari :
We are too quiet !

Michiko :
We cannot open our mouths.

Kazuhiko :
I want to ask questions, and I also want teachers to reply to me.

Mari :
So do I. But everyone is too quiet, so I don' t have a chance to do this.

Michiko :
I don't know why it is so quiet.

Rika :
We don't know people around us very well. We don't know the class members very well.

Mari :
Because there is a clear distinction between the teacher and students.

Kazuhiko :
The important thing is encouragement. If the teacher says "your essay was very impressive", then I would like to write an even better one next time and surprise him. So, I will be more motivated. I believe the communication between teachers and students is extremely important.

The students seem to be aware that they have the responsibility to motivate themselves. At the same time, however, they expressed a need for the teachers' understanding, as well.

(3) Discussion

As previously discussed, Japanese students are typically viewed as passive learners. In this interview, however, the students expressed their feelings, and talked about their ideas with regards to classroom learning. From the above extracts, the students seem to be aware that students and teachers need to make an effort to change the process of classroom learning. They expressed a need for interaction between the teacher and students. Also, they seem to think the students' role should be that of

active learner and the teachers' role that of facilitators or advisors. Probably their behaviour in the classroom is affected by the atmosphere of the class ; the class room atmosphere may be influenced by the relationship of the teacher and other students. It may be the case that our students' real insights are different from their external appearance in the classroom. Learner autonomy should be concerned not only with self-directedness, but also awareness of making supportive and collaborative classroom atmosphere.
Another point I would like to emphasize is that the teachers' attitude might be the key for learner autonomy. In the past, I also saw Japanese students' classroom behaviour from the stereotypical view. I had my belief that the students got used to teacher authority, and spoon-fed education, and therefore, they prefer to be told by their teacher and accept everything. For this reason, I have always thought that the students need to be trained in terms of changing their attitudes. However, after conducting the focus group interviews, I realized that I was unconsciously expecting them to be dependent students. Instead of trusting the students' potentials, I had the negative feeling towards them that I have to change my students BECAUSE THEY ARE NOT AWARE OF THEIR RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR OWN LEARNING.

Cotterall (1998) discussed the importance of the attitude of teachers towards their students. She also emphasized the crucial role of the learner-teacher relationship for fostering learner autonomy. In their book, Barry & King (1998) insisted that teachers' expectations towards their students largely influenced their passivity. In my opinion, learner development should promote learners' self-confidence and self-motivation through the language learning process in order to encourage learners to believe in their own potential. At the same time, it is extremely important for students to get the teachers' support and understanding. The teachers' role should be considered as that of making an effort to understand the learners' perspectives, and trust in their students' potentials.

Here, I would like to introduce some extracts of the students' comments on journal-dialogue activity with their teacher.

"I worried a lot about my English class. But in my journal, I have a place where I could express myself. I feel I had a little bit of a negative attitude, but I think I have become more positive now ".

"Journal writing was the best aspect in this class. Because the teacher tried to listen to our opinions, I felt that I was not forced to study. Instead, I felt that I attended the class for my own sake. I would like to continue my journal writing".

"I could personally ask questions on how to learn, etc, even though I could not ask questions in the class. Also, the classroom lessons have improved because the teacher considered our opinions when making her lessons".

Puchta (1999) said, " our students' negative and positive beliefs can be an enormous influence on the success of their learning. Not only the students' beliefs, but also those of the teachers can have a strong systemic on the students' success (p257).
Puchta quoted Diana Whitmore's words :

"It is not what we do with our students, it is who we are. No great teaching method will be enough, if we ourselves are not at home. We are all teachers and learners. Educators can educate only if they are willing to put themselves into question as well " (p259).

(4-2) A Case-Study : One example of an autonomous learner's self-directness

(1) Method

What needs to be considered for promoting learner autonomy ?
One learner who seems to be recognized as an autonomous learner was interviewed. This retrospective interview data was tape recorded and transcribed, then analyzed by focusing on how the learner thinks about her own learning in order to clarify learner autonomy aspects.

(2) About Fumiko

Fumiko is a 4th year student major in English at a private university in Kanazawa, Japan. She started learning English at a junior high school in Japan and continued on at high school. The instruction was from a Japanese English teacher. Her experience in learning English at school was considered the same as most of the students in Japan. She has been

to New Zealand for 4 weeks in her 2nd year at university, as a part of the course curriculum. She has never been outside of Japan except these 4 weeks. I have known her since she was a first year student, when I saw her practising English reading or listening to tapes nearly everyday. Also, I saw she often tried to get opportunities to talk with native English teachers. I had a short private talk with her just before her first trip abroad. At that time, she was a second year student. I was impressed with her because her English was so good, but I heard she had never been overseas. So I wanted to know about her more.
Fumiko's TOEIC score was more than 900 points in November, 1998.This has improved 375 points compared with her score in her 1st year (in April, 1996). The 4th year students' total number is approximetely190; their mean score is around 500, the improvement score of the total students is about 150. Considering her achievement and improvement, she can be recommended as one of the most outstanding students in the university. The retrospective interview was organised regarding her perspectives on her own English learning. The interview was conducted in English.
Before the interview date, the purpose of the interview was told to her, but the main questions were shown just before the interview.
(The transcription of the interview is her exact words; therefore, it is not corrected).

(3) The result

The extracts below are some parts of the retrospective interview data from Fumiko.

How have you been trying to improve your English outside class ?

"I read at least one article everyday. And I read "Time" to get used to longer passage. Secondly, I try to get used to natural speed English. I watch CNN news. And, thirdly, I read Japanese newspaper, everyday. In my opinion, the broader our knowledge is, the better we understand when I get information in English. Fourth, I take examinations like TOEIC, TOEFL, and EIKEN, and so on".

She has her own learning strategies to improve her English. She identified cognitive strategies of reading and listening, and also metacognitive strategies (Oxford, 1990) of daily activity planning and self-evaluation.

Moreover, she seems to be aware of the importance of the background knowledge for English learning (In this sense, she has metacognitive awareness).

What sorts of things are influenced in your language learning ?

"First, I'm very interested in things outside of Japan. So, I wanted to know about different people, different countries and cultures. In one way to know about different countries is exchange letters with people who live in those countries. So, I started to make penpals. I learned how to write in English by writing letters in English. When I was a junior high school student, I, everyday come home and saw the mail box if there was a letter from overseas. And I found one, I felt with gratitude. Second, I played the piano and violin. I have a good ear for sound, I guess. This is why I am able to pick up English pronunciation very quickly. Thirdly, I learned by heart. All the English dialogues in the English textbook used in junior high school as I was told by my English teacher. I think it is very beneficial, not only we can understand the basic grammar, but also we can use expressions in conversation. My basic of my English is what I learned in a junior high school".

From her reflection, the motivation type was "interest in foreign languages and cultures (Dornyei, 1994). For satisfying this motivation, she made pen pals. As a result, she could use English as a communication tool. On the other hand, she also emphasises memory strategy, which can be seen as her Japaneseness !? Or her Japanese teacher's strong influence !? The interesting thing is her belief that relates her music skill with English pronunciation skill. In this way, she is showing self-confidence as well as her uniqueness.

How do you connect inside & outside classroom learning ?

"I prepare for the class and review the class. So together make complete class".

She considers her classroom learning as only part of her learning. It forms the core of her learning and is supplemented by outside classroom learning. She insists that inside and outside classroom, learning can not be separated and together they constitute her present learning.

On what occasions do you feel frustrated ?

"My TOEIC scores, EIKEN scores didn't improve at all, I feel frustration. But when I feel frustration I try to believe in myself. I believe in myself, keep trying very hard. No change. If I keep trying, I will progress. It's very difficult, but even if I don't concentrate on my studies, I use the time to study English. I try. keep trying".

She is a reflective learner : she evaluates her progress, and if she finds no improvement, she feels frustrated. That is purely her own matter. She compares her past ability to the present; therefore, it is not a matter of comparison with others. In addition, she is very conscious about time. Also, she has a positive self-belief in her ability to learn. This belief seems to lead her to progress in learning and gives her strong independent support.

What is your role inside the classroom ?

"What I need to do is keep trying as a learner. English is -- studying English is my purpose and at the same time, English is the means of communication. So one goal as a learner is to improve my English. To get everything from the class, from the teacher. To get everything in that class. To take full advantage of the class.

Her thinking is self-directed. She is aware of her responsibility to motivate herself to learn as a learner. She thinks the most important thing is not the given environment but that she should make her own environment suit her learning. She insists that the important thing is the learner him/herself, rather than the style or method of classroom learning.

What is the role of the teacher ?

" To provide students with appropriate textbook and timely advice according to their English level ".

She thinks the role of the teacher is giving appropriate information and advice.

What is classroom learning ?

" Helping each other, I realise what other people do, or think. I can get ideas from the class that I can't think of by myself ".

She considers classroom learning as a place for interaction with others. She is aware of learning from her social relationship with others.

What do you think yourself as a learner ?

" I think myself as an ideal learner because I'm studying the subject what I'm interested in. There is a saying what you like you will do well. I'm practising that saying".

What is language learning for you ?

" For me, language is a means of communication. So, what the most important thing is what I can do , using the language. So, I'm trying to acquire English as a means of communication".

How do you motivate yourself ?

" I set a goal. As I said before, energy gravitate towards clear goals. Even if I can not achieve that goal, I will progress, I guess.

Do you have an ability to achieve your goal ?

" If I have a strong will to make my dream come true, I will, I have, yes".

She has a particular goal in mind. She thinks she reflects on exactly what she wants to do and what she can do. She questions herself and also tries to think in a flexible way. This attitude seems to be the basis of her learning and thinking. As previously indicated, she has a positive belief about her capability.

(4) Discussion

What can we learn from the case of Fumiko ? I would like to consider all the following kinds of learners' thoughts as learner autonomy.

- Own language learning strategies
- Metacognitive awareness
- Belief on language learning
- Self-confidence
- Self-reflection : comparing the present-self with the past-self
- Self-directedness : awareness of learner responsibility and self-motivation
- Connecting inside/outside classroom learning
- Awareness of interaction with others

Riley (1996) identified four constitutive elements as 'self', 'access', 'language' and 'learning'. In my opinion, how the learner thinks about self is the most important factor in terms of thinking about learner autonomy. At the IATEFL conference '99, in Edinburgh, Herbert Puchta (1999) gave his plenary talk on the significant influence of learners' beliefs about capabilities and beliefs about identity. Bandura (1997) called this effect as ' self-efficacy theory'. According to his empirical work, Bandura said a person's belief on his/her capabilities would affect on his/her behaviour and performance. Puchta stressed that a student, who has supportive beliefs, will have a better basis for success than someone who has not. Puchta also emphasised the significant influence of the teachers' beliefs and the teachers' expectations on the results of their students' learning and students' positive/negative beliefs.

Fumiko's case is of course one example. But from this case, we can see learner autonomy and autonomous learning from a different angle. In the case of Fumiko, learner autonomy can exist in her mind whatever the situation is !

I asked Fumiko again and made a tape of her interview. This time however, the interview was prepared for the purpose of motivating the first year students. After listening to the tape, the students commented. Although 5 students had no comments, out of 75 students, 70 students expressed their positive feelings. Such as " I want to be like her in my 4th

year", " I will do my best like her", I need to make more effort ", or " I think I should also be able to be like her ".

I would like to show you some of their comments in the English version.

"She has an awareness of English as her life-long learning and as part of her body. How about me ? I still feel as though I am being forced to study. I think that is the big difference."

"When I listened to the tape, I honestly thought ' I can't do it like her'. I thought she really liked English. Of course, I also like it very much, but I have realised that only this kind of feeling can't produce a better outcome. I would like to make the effort but I don't want to be defeated."

"I agree with what she said but I think that I have my own way and, maybe, I can find other better ways. I need to try and find one by myself."

"I know her. Among my seniors, I respect her the most. When she see me, she starts talking to me in English. Whenever I see her, she is reading newspapers, or talking with professors, or listening to CNN news with headphones. Anyway, she is a wonderful person."

From Marie-Christine Press (1996)'s words :

"learner autonomy is considered a desirable aim. But increasing evidence of different cultural expectations requires a more sensitive interpretation of the cultural background to make informed choices as to the forms of learning which suit them best. University courses can profitably exploit the time when newly enrolled students start to study in a different environment, to facilitate self-reflection and explore the benefits of learner autonomy, meaning not so much working on one's own as developing a personal sense of direction and responsibility for one's learning. This aim is more likely to be achieved by students who have gained some understanding of their own culturally-influenced attitudes and of how they interact with the learning environment". (p. 251).

(4-3) From open-ended questionnaires : Learners' role / classroom role

(1) The Purpose of the Study

The study was to find out the students' thoughts about both their own role as a learner and classroom learning.

(2) The Informants

The data was taken from 52 Japanese, EFL major students in a private university in Kanazawa, Japan in October 1998.

1st year students 26 (male : female = 8 : 18)
2nd year students 26 (male : female = 4 : 22)
Total 52 (male : female =12:40)

(3) The Methods of Collecting the Data

The students were asked to write their opinions freely in their journal about the topics of : 1) learner role, 2) classroom role.
Their journals were written in Japanese. Then, the transcriptions were translated into English. 52 transcriptions were compared and then the common themes were categorized. The percentage was calculated, according to the frequency of the indication

(4) The Results

1) What is the learner role?

Category Analysis
The data was coded and divided into ten groups as follows :

Self-direction [40.4%]

- learning by myself
- being always aware of absorbing something actively
- not only receiving lessons passively
- doing whatever I can do, by myself
- having (showing) my own desire, motivation and attitude to learn for myself
- being autonomous (independence)
- carrying on what I need to do
- obtaining something by myself

Seeking self-growth opportunities [14.9%]

- deepening my understanding skill
- broadening my view
- internationalising myself
- drawing on my ability which stays unconsciously inside myself
- having an interest in different cultures

Seeking learning opportunities [14.9%]

- having opportunities to talk and learn naturally
- remembering words step by step

Being aware of objectives and goal setting [8.5%]

- being aware of the purpose of learning
- proceeding with a goal of learning

Self-monitoring [6.4%]

- finding out what I do not know
- getting rid of my laziness
- realising that my role is to study
- study in a suitable level for me
- concentrating

Motivating self [4.3%]

- enjoying learning
- always questioning something with curiosity
- making an effort to learn enjoyably
- try to learn seriously

Environmental structuring [2.1%]

- making an environment for participating actively

Getting information [2.1%]

- listening to the teachers' talking

Examples of the students' quotes

Until I was told to write in my journal, I honestly had never thought about my role. I only thought I should study hard. So when I try to write about my role, it is not so easy. I am ashamed of myself. Today, it is not difficult to go abroad, compared with the past. Therefore, we can hear

information from the world straightaway. So, by learning the language, we can directly touch the world and I can obtain the information more accurately. Also, if I can improve my language skills, it becomes possible to connect myself to the world. Then I will be able to expand my perceptions as a whole. I cannot put my ideas into shape but one thing I can say, is that I would like to think that learning the language is important in my daily life..

When we learn English, the most important thing is to enjoy it. Whatever we learn, enjoyment is important. I would like to study English enjoyably.

When I learn, I would like to learn properly. Not doing things half way, or not just being taught by teachers. I would like to attend the lessons with the awareness of learning for myself. To attend the lessons by taking responsibility on our own. It has no meaning if we do only what teachers say. It is the learners' role to seize something by ourselves.

In my opinion, the learners' role is to continue to investigate. We always need to ask something and try to make efforts to know something.

I think that the learners' role is to take responsibility for our own learning. Even if we are given a good environment or good opportunities around us, we will not be able to make the best use of the conditions, if we do not want to do something by ourselves. Therefore, we cannot put the blame on another for no improvement.

The environment is surely important but we need to get the power on our own to absorb things which are given. In this point, I think it is important to let us be responsible on our own.

It is the only way for me to devise a way to study in order to improve my school marks or keep my skills up. Besides, as it is said, "many a little, makes a mickle", I need to do it step by step. I am a weak-willed person, so it is very difficult for me to continue it. But it is something that I must to do.

I think we should do whatever we can do, on our own and without the classroom. Then, we should find what we couldn't understand from our individual work.

In my overseas experience, I have reflected my previous attitude. Students should not learn with a passive attitude, but learn independently. It is up to the person whether she/he can acquire things that they have learnt at each lesson.

2) What is classroom role ?

Category Analysis
The data was divided into eight groups as follows :

Interdependence [41.5%]
- stimulating each other
- sharing opinions with each other
- helping each other
- learning together and competing with one another in order to develop one's ability (seeing others as rivals)
- listening to other people's opinions
- people, who have the same purpose, gather together and find out each other's thoughts and opinions

Developing own learning [12.2%]
- being recognised that I am there
- developing my own learning which I have done at home
- having one's own opinion

Discovery [9.8%]
- discovering various things from associations of groups
- expanding my perspectives
- looking from various angles

Organising [7.3%]
- making my own way for study (preview - lessons - review)
- making one of standards
- making an atmosphere for learning

Getting new things [4.9%]
- absorbing knowledge
- learning new things
- getting information
- not talking

Getting support and help [4.9%]

- getting support for learning
- fostering the ways of co-operation
- getting help for individual study

Getting learning opportunities [4.9%]

- giving opportunities for learning
- getting something that interests me

Solving problems [2.4%]

- checking answers
- presenting my own results of learning
- solving what I could not understand

Examples of the students' quotes

Classroom learning is important. For sure, there are good things and bad things depending on the environment, but in my opinion, it is not appropriate to point out only bad things. In previous lessons, the teacher read class members' journals. The point is, in other words, people who have the same purpose of learning the language get together and hear their thoughts or feelings.
For me, this is nothing more than being appreciated. When I am doing language study, sometimes I feel I have been improving, and sometimes I feel I have not been improving at all, regardless of my effort. Of course, this kind of thing is common for everyone. So, when people have such predicaments, I can hear about what sort of feelings they have, and how they overcome them, etc. It becomes my support. Therefore, classroom learning is of course needed to develop our own skills. So we usually want to get good lessons. But not only this, there are lots of things we need to learn. I think I would like to do everything with positive thinking.

In English lessons, we can interact with native teachers or persons who have more knowledge. In this point, I think we can enjoy our learning differently rather than studying on our own.

By studying with people in the class, I can hear other people's opinions, or I can have opportunities to talk with them. Sometimes I discover new things that I would never find out by myself. Also it is good stimulation to

have rivals, as I am given strength to do my best. For the above reasons, classroom learning is necessary for me.

It is important to have the feeling that I exist in the class.

Basically, the classroom is the place where we gain skills to develop our own learning at home.

In my opinion, the classroom is the place for presenting our own learning outcomes and also the place for learning new things. If we can take advantage of lessons well, we will spend profitable time; otherwise, it is just wasting our time.

I have changed my thinking about classroom learning, compared with my high school days. That is because one teacher said, "classroom is the place for presenting individuals' thought and study, and it is the place for influencing each other." Therefore, if each student does not prepare for the lesson, it is meaningless. Previously, it was for me to be taught but now I realise it is different at university. In my opinion, if each person's attitude towards learning changes, the whole class may be influenced and changed.

School lessons give only a little help in learning. Learners themselves need to have the will to proceed by themselves.

The students' attitude should be motivated to learn, know the meaning of learning and enjoy learning. The classroom is the place where people get together. Therefore, it means that classroom members should co-operate with each other and expand their own ideas by getting other people's ideas. The present problem of classroom learning is passivity and a kind of mechanical learning. Even if there are various ideas, we are managed by the specific ones.

Lessons are one process of the streams, such as checking students' preview study and then obtaining knowledge by reviewing the lessons on their own. For this reason, it is best that students make an effort on three things - preview->lessons->review.

I think it does not always hold true that all material given by teachers is interesting. So, if we find and try interesting things from the given materials, we will improve.

(5) Discussions

There seems to be a gap between the students' external passivity and their internal perceptions. Learner training often concerns raising awareness of the students own learning process or teaching effective strategies. However, I feel that there are more important things to consider for learner development. The learners might know what they should do, but the biggest problem for them might be a psychological barrier. Keim's, et.al. (1996) survey study on Japanese students' attitudes and beliefs about foreign language learning also supports the above point. Keim et.al. is convinced that there exists a real divergence between the students' awareness about new strategies and their actual behaviour in class. In addition, the attempts to elicit more information from students, by journal writing, revealed that "fear and insecurity play a significant role in the way students behave in class, even though they genuinely wish to improve their English and , in some cases, would actually like to behave differently." (p. 99)
The above statement supports this study as well.
In order to carry out the students' desire to be active participants, awareness of the responsibility to make such classroom atmosphere is needed from both teachers and students. Understanding and effort are needed for both teachers and students for good classroom learning.
From the above point, learner development can be considered as giving students opportunities to think about their struggles and to stimulate awareness of their responsibility as a learner.

5. Conclusion

The students seem to be aware that their role should be as active learners. Also, they seem to seek interactions with others in their classroom learning. The biggest problem may exist in the gap between their awareness and their actual behaviour. It seems to be a barrier between what the students think and what they really do.
In my opinion, the above problem will not be solved by simply encouraging a change in the students' learning styles or strategies. In order to promote real learner autonomy, what is needed ? Strategy training, learner training for awareness-raising, group work/project work setting. Are they really a solution in Japanese classroom context? The students may change their behaviour or attitudes depending on the situations ; in a

particular setting, they can be active learners, in other situations, they are still passive. The students' external appearance might be different from their real insights. In Japanese contexts, what is the best way to promote learner autonomy ? In general, Japanese students do not seem to have opportunities to think about their role as a learner. The students are expected to correctly follow the teachers' directions and have got used to doing their best for such expectations. At this point, it might be worth asking the students about what they really think about themselves.

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